

Status of NH National Guard deployed units as of Feb. 5, 2005

Total number of NH National Guardsmen: 2,700

NH Army National Guard: 1,700
698 in Iraq, 67 in Afghanistan

NH Air National Guard: 1,000
9 in Iraq, 1 in England, 1 in Germany, 23 in Guam

Number of NH Guardsmen deployed overseas: 776

1. C Company, 3rd of the 172nd Infantry Regiment (Mountain), based in Manchester. 180 soldiers in Iraq conducting security and patrol operations. Scheduled to return to the US this month.

2. 744th Transportation Company, based in Hillsboro, with armories in Claremont and Somersworth. 150 soldiers in Iraq conducting transportation missions. Scheduled to return to US this month.

3. Headquarters, 197th Field Artillery, based in Manchester. 120 soldiers in Iraq. The unit is a command and control element for three battalions, which are conducting security missions. Scheduled to return to US in two groups. First group arrived at Fort Drum, NY on Feb. 4. Second group scheduled to return week of Feb. 6.

4. 2nd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery, based in Berlin with armories in Lancaster, Littleton, Plymouth, Woodsville, Lebanon and Franklin. 180 soldiers in Iraq conducting security missions. Scheduled to return to US this month

5. 1st Battalion, 172nd Field Artillery, based in Manchester with armories in Rochester, Portsmouth, Milford and Nashua. 180 soldiers in Iraq conducting security missions. Returned to NH on Feb. 2.

6. 210th Engineer Detachment, based in Peterborough. 50 soldiers in Afghanistan providing engineering and construction support for Operation Enduring Freedom. Scheduled to return to US this month.

7. 260th Air Traffic Control Squadron, Operations Support Flight, Mission Support Flight – NH Air National Guard based at Pease in Newington. 6 airmen from ATC, 2 airmen from Operations Support Flight, 1 airman from Mission Support Flight in Iraq.

8. Combat Service Support Team, 3rd Brigade. 17 soldiers representing different NH Army National Guard units and specialties in Afghanistan to provide mentorship to Afghan National Army in a variety of fields.

9. 1st Battalion, 172nd Field Artillery, Rear Area Operations Center. 28 soldiers representing different NH Army National Guard units for command and control mission in Iraq.

10. 1159th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) based in Concord. 110 soldiers staging in Kuwait and Iraq for air medical missions. Company departed US in January 2005.

* **Note: 3643rd Maintenance Company, based in Concord** has provided more than half its guardsmen to augment deploying units.

UPDATES FROM UNIT COMMANDERS IN THEATER

Editor's Note: The following updates were emailed by the unit commanders. They were slightly edited for grammar and operational security. This is the eighth installment.

744th Transportation Company

***Capt. Mary Bergner of Hampton** is commander of the 744th Transportation Company. The unit arrived in Iraq in early March 2004. Its mission has been to transport dry goods, water, food, petroleum products and general supplies to ground units. The company is scheduled to return to the US this month. Editor's Note: **1st Lt. Ana Cutting of Penacook** has been acting commander for the past several months. Capt. Bergner returned to the US for medical reasons unrelated to her military duty. The following update is from **1st Lt. Cutting**.*

Over the past few weeks, I have been thinking a lot about the 744th's year in Iraq. 2004 has always seemed to me to be never-ending, while in retrospect, it seemed as if it has come and gone in the blink of the eye. As **Chief Warrant Officer 3 John Schlang of Farmington** always tells me, "The days last forever, but the months fly by"....OK, some months more than others! What a year it has been. We have been away from our families and homes, and we have experienced more than our share of emotional roller-coaster rides. You have been there with us along the way. I reflect upon 2004 even more as we eagerly approach the time when we are able to return to our families and friends and to our great state of New Hampshire. The smiles, the hugs, and the celebration of reunited families in the near future are what keep us going; counting down those days.

I think back to when we first arrived at Fort Drum, NY, many of us new to each other and to the unit, full of hopes and expectations, eager to train hard and to do our part. I've looked back at pictures of us in Kuwait, impatiently awaiting our orders to come north, into unknown territory, preparing every day for the long job that lay ahead of us, and to "officially" start our mission. Fresh-faces, brand new uniforms, the endless rehearsing of battle drills—it's amazing to me to think of how much we have changed in one year, and how GOOD we have gotten with combat convoy operations.

Endless enemy attacks from the insurgents in this tumultuous country have resulted in many frightening moments, both on the roads and in our own company area. Numerous brave individuals in our company have earned Purple Hearts, and we carry the heartbreaking grief of losing **Sgt. Jeremiah Holmes of North Berwick, ME** in March of last year.

The soldiers in the 744th have proven themselves time and again to get the job done, no matter what stands in our way. It's what being a soldier is all about. The stories we bring home to share amongst each other and with our families range from scary to funny to sad. Again, it's been a roller-coaster ride.

I have seen the soldiers in this company grow to rely wholeheartedly on one another time and again, to work as a team and accept each mission with a firm resolve. We have survived situations we never imagined. Instances like the time our soldiers recovered a KBR driver and his vehicle while right in the middle of a heavy firefight, and 744th soldiers returning fire to the enemy from their gun truck and ensuring the safety of the rest of the convoy as their own truck was riddled with bullets--that's the stuff our soldiers are made of.

There are many more examples of our company's soldiers truly reflecting our Army Values; especially duty, selfless service, and personal courage, and those will be stories our families will

likely hear time and again once we are home, but that is just a peek into some of the experiences we have encountered while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom. There are many more. We have come to be a family, and that, simply, is why we are so strong.

As we start preparing for our move south, and ultimately back to the States, I look at the faces of all the soldiers in the 744th Transportation Company, now battle-hardened, yet maintaining that spirit we are known for. With resolve and resilience, not to mention a lot of laughter, we conduct our missions from day to day, continuing to set the standard.

This month (January) our total mission miles hit over 650,000 and over 32,000 short tons hauled. It's no small feat to accomplish what the soldiers of this unit have, in an extremely dangerous theater of operations, with 100% mission accomplishment.

The other day, the new chaplain with our battalion mentioned a passage that I thought was relevant to the 744th-- where we have been and where we are headed. It was: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it." As our light at the end of the tunnel gets bigger and brighter, I encourage you all to hang in there—just a little bit longer—and know that everything we do, we do with you, our families and friends, all in our hearts. We have so much to look forward to in the upcoming weeks. Here's to 2005!

C Company, 3rd of the 172nd Infantry (Regiment) "Mountain Company"

Capt. Raymond Valas of Goffstown is commander of C Company, 3rd of the 172nd Infantry (Mountain). The mission set Mountain Company has been Movement to Contact, Ambush, Checkpoints, Civil Affairs Personal Security Detail, Radio Relay Stations, Iraqi Highway Patrol Development, and Outer Cordon for Fallujah operations. The company arrived in Iraq in late March 2004. It is scheduled to return to the US this month.

January has been a very active month for Company C, 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry (Mountain), with preparations for the upcoming Iraqi elections at the crux of our missions. The company has been working on moving critical election assets into place, as well as working with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to prepare them for the event.

Over the course of the past year, there has been a steady and tangible increase in the role of the ISF in developing the stability of Iraq. A year ago, there were few actions that involved Iraq's own military and police, but now we see a strong and well trained Iraqi Army, Iraqi Police, Iraqi Highway Patrol, and Iraqi National Guard. It has been rewarding for us on the ground to see platoons and companies of Iraq's own forces out in our sector, responding to incidents and actions that would have previously have been Charlie Company's sole responsibility. It is a true indicator that Iraq as a nation is moving forward towards stability. The ranks of the ISF are steadily increasing, filling with brave Iraqis intent on making their country safe from insurgents and terrorists. This week alone, the Iraqi Highway Patrol station in our area added 29 new officers.

While the situation in our sector is improving for the local populace, the area is dangerous and there is still work to be done. A few days ago, **1st Lt. Paul Levin of Dover** and a squad led by **Staff Sgt. Gerald Durgin of Peterborough** were at an Iraqi Security Forces headquarters building in Baghdad, Iraq. While inside the headquarters compound they heard a gunfight erupt outside the compound a short distance from their location. Durgin directed the squad to maneuver to the fight when he learned from the IHPs that they had officers involved and injured.

When they arrived on the scene Durgin and Levin immediately assessed the scene and set up security around the injured Iraqi Police Officers. A sedan had pulled up along the IHPs and opened fire on them with small arms fire. At the time there were roughly 20 IHP personnel around the area. While under sporadic fire, Durgin quickly took charge and directed them to set up security along with his squad around the perimeter.

While security was being established, **Sgt. Zach Bazzi of Watertown, MA., Sgt. Robert Pavnick of Barnstead,** and **Sgt. Jayson Neville of Concord** immediately began treating the two injured IHPs. Throughout the time they were on the ground they came under sporadic fire while the IHPs providing security returned fire. Bazzi, Pavnick and Neville professionally and methodically assessed, treated and stabilized the casualties. Levin called in the air MEDEVAC and prepared the landing zone until the wounded Iraqis were evacuated. The actions of Bazzi, Neville, and Pavnick saved the lives of the ISF personnel through their calm actions while under fire.

The soldiers of Company C also faced threats while working to ensure the election infrastructure is in place. On the night of Jan. 16, 2nd **Lt. Dan Newman of Merrimack** and his platoon were moving balloting equipment into a distribution point. The convoy encountered a 2 kilometer long oil slick that had been emplaced by insurgents. As the platoon maneuvered forward, they were engaged from the side of the route with heavy small arms and rocket propelled grenade fire. **Sgt. Tom Flood of Berlin** identified the enemy and engaged with well aimed fire from his .50 caliber heavy machine gun. All humvee's and armored security vehicles engaged with their M2 machine guns and automatic grenade launchers. **Staff Sgt. Sage Ladieu of Alton** had the courage to maneuver back into the ambush to position his gunner, **Spc. Ken Clark of Stoneham, MA.** where he could suppress the enemy and allow the rest of his platoon to exit the kill zone. **Spc. Corey Clark of Hill** and **Spc. Josh Mavrogoerge of Hooksett,** as the gunners in the armored security vehicles, were able to help Clark suppress the enemy using their .50 caliber heavy machine guns. Due to the volume of fire that the platoon was able to direct on the enemy, the element they were securing was able to escape the attack. Their actions made possible the positioning of key materials for the upcoming Iraqi elections.

210th Engineer Detachment

***Capt. Craig Lapiana of Merrimack** is commander of the 210th Engineer Detachment. His soldiers have been in Afghanistan since early March 2004. The detachment is supporting engineer and construction projects. It is scheduled to return to the US this month.*

Well the mountains here are covered in snow and it is cold in Afghanistan. Every time I see them my heart is touched and I think of Tuckerman's Ravine in the White Mountains.

The snow on the mountains brings brisk mornings as carpenters, plumbers, electricians, horizontal and other crews scramble around for materials and tools to prepare for the day's missions. If you could see the activity you would not think that we are also preparing for the end of our deployment. We are still going full tilt and to be honest with you we will not be slowing down until we put our feet on that "bird" heading home.

Keeping busy is good medicine for staying strong and focused on our goal of getting home safe and sound.

It is truly amazing that a year has already passed. Has it really been that long since we lived in New England? It is hard to explain in that it seems like such a long time ago but at the same time

it doesn't. Things have gone quicker for many soldiers who have had a positive attitude since our arrival in this country. Many have found strength in a renewed and stronger faith in God, which is a blessing. But overall everybody has stayed occupied with lots of activities after duty hours to make each day pass quicker.

Soldiers do a lot of reading. Some teach English classes to coalition forces and many work out at the gym. Quite a few attend Bible studies. A few have attended college courses and most watch endless piles of DVD movies. Now that our departure date is in the near future it will be interesting to see if any of these activities continue back home. The most important thing is we will be home.

It is funny talking with people all over post in that it is the little things that are missed the most. You simply don't see how much you cherish these little things in life until you are away from them for some time. Things like a loved one's hug, a snuggle on a cold night, a home cooked meal, American toilets, fresh baked cookies and milk, green grass, trees, colorful birds, butterflies, clean air, marshmallow fires, ocean waves, fishing, pine cones, a child's giggle, ice cold beer, critters hopping around in leaves, acorns, pig piles, backyard barbeques, soft served ice cream and of course chicken nuggets.

I feel that next month we will be reflecting back on what was accomplished this past year and a half. With a glass of lemonade and a rocking chair on a farmer's porch we will talk about many of the things that took place. Such as the people's excitement over their first-ever freely elected president of Afghanistan, who is starting to get his country back on its feet.

How the Taliban fundamentalists are on their last leg, running out of places to hide. How Afghan women now have individual rights for the first time ever, and the way we have heard that they are starting to remove their Taliban-dictated Burka dress.

Amazing in that only a few years ago, a woman could be stoned in public for disobeying a law. Now they have freedoms never imagined and you are seeing smiles that where once covered for years with a "head to toe" dress.

How the children are now able to attend school, many for the first time, in a safe clean environment. The children show such excitement too in that school is no longer cancelled because of the elements. Sand storms are blocked by new glass windows and the rain is deflected with newly installed roofing.

And of course we will reflect back on how we helped the fighting force and bases effectiveness in being able to improve the overall quality of life for the service members and coalition forces. The skills that these 210th soldiers brought to the fight made this all possible and the reputation that will be left here in Afghanistan is a testament to the great state of New Hampshire and our National Guard organization.

One last thing is that I ask you to put aside all the difficulties of separation and simply take a moment to look at the big picture. It will require not focusing on our hardships but on what the nation as a whole has set out to accomplish. It really is not about us but about the future which makes it very difficult in the society which we live in.

It all gets boiled down to protecting the freedom of a nation. The first thing you might think about is the nation of Afghanistan. Many here see it as protecting our children's future too. We each want our children to be able to grow up as we did enjoying the blessing that our nation provides. These blessing can so easily be lost if we focus on our own difficulties and hardship. Instead, I say we give thanks for all that we have missed and soon will enjoy again and keep focused at the task at hand. I will end with thanking you for your continued support and God Bless.

Headquarters, 197th Field Artillery Brigade

Col. James Guise of Tucson, Arizona is commander for HQ, 197th FAB, which arrived in Iraq in early March 2004. Its mission has been to provide command and control of three subordinate field artillery battalions, each is from a different state. Command and control functions include mission assignments, providing and coordinating logistics support, maintaining morale, welfare and unit discipline. The three battalions assigned to HQ, 197th FAB are from the West Virginia, South Dakota and South Carolina Army National Guards. The first group of 70 soldiers from the Brigade arrived at Fort Drum, NY on Feb. 4. The second group of 50 soldiers is scheduled to arrive at Fort Drum during the week of Feb. 6.

The 197th Field Artillery Brigade has been in theater for almost 11 months. Our time here is rapidly coming to an end and we are seeing the arrival of our replacements from the 56th Brigade Combat Team from the Texas Army National Guard. They will assume our mission and may be given additional ones since they are quite a bit larger than us. Our brigade headquarters and the majority of our three battalions are still located in the southeastern part of Iraq near the city of An Nasariyah. We have over 1,300 soldiers under the control of Headquarters & Headquarters Battery, 197th FAB. The majority of the brigade is located at Tallil Air Base, but we have batteries and sections spread out over 22 remote locations.

Our primary mission has remained the same, the command and control of three artillery battalions. 1-201st FA from West Virginia has the primary mission of conducting convoy security for Southern Iraq. 2-147th FA from South Dakota is securing stock piles of captured enemy ammunition at various sites in southern Iraq and working with civilian contractors so that it can be destroyed. 3-178th FA from South Carolina continues to provide security for fixed communication sites. They also provide quick reaction forces to assist units traveling along the main supply route in our area, and relay medevac requests for them in times of emergency.

To date our battalions have driven over 1,700,000 miles escorting convoys, and have either moved or destroyed over 10,000 tons of captured enemy ammunition.

Things have been very busy lately for in addition to our daily operations, we are loading connexes in preparation for redeployment. We took the initiative to have some of our soldiers trained as US Customs Inspectors, that way we could load and seal our connexes in Iraq and not wait till we move to Kuwait. Other units here at Tallil Air Base have learned that we now have the capability to do Customs Inspections, and have asked for our assistance to help with their redeployment.

Every section in our headquarters battery was required to prepare a continuity binder of how we conduct our operations here in Iraq. When we conduct our Relief In Place mission with the 56th Brigade, we will pass on all our lessons learned to our replacements. Our plan is to set them up for success.

In the next week we will have our awards ceremony to reward and acknowledge the service and achievements performed by the soldiers and officers of Headquarters, Headquarters Battery, 197th Field Artillery Brigade. In our brigade headquarters 17 soldiers and officers will be awarded the Bronze Star Medal for service during Operation Iraq Freedom II, 60 soldiers will be awarded the Army Commendation Medal for either service or achievement, two soldiers will be awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, and two soldiers will be awarded the Army Achievement medal.

Acknowledging the outstanding job our soldiers have done and the sacrifices they have made will be an important moment for these well deserving soldiers. But, there is one more ceremony that we must do, and in a way that will be our most significant ceremony here in Iraq, and that is our Transfer of Authority Ceremony with the 56th Brigade. Our Transfer of Authority is a symbolic and significant event for it signifies that we have completed our mission and can now return home to New Hampshire.

2nd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery Forward

***Capt. Matt Boucher of Barrington** is commander of 2nd Battalion, 197th Field Artillery Forward. His unit consists of four platoons each of which is conducting a variety of security mission in Ba'Qubah, Mosul and Tikrit. The unit is known as "White Mountain Thunder." It arrived in Iraq in March 2004 and is scheduled to return to the US this month.*

2nd Platoon update by **Sgt. 1st Class Christopher St. Cyr of Lancaster**, 2nd Plt. Sergeant:

December 2004 was another busy month for the 2nd Platoon and Operations personnel stationed in Ba'Qubah, Iraq. We processed and delivered 248 police recruits from the Diyala Province of Iraq to the Baghdad Police Academy on Dec. 18, 2004. On Dec. 27, 2004 we processed and delivered 248 recruits to the As Sulaymaniyah Police Academy. Both Academies run an eight week class for new police recruits to train the new officers of the law on their duties and responsibilities before putting them to work stabilizing the towns and cities of Iraq.

Staff Sgt. John Legere's (of **Berlin**) 3rd Squad was on the escort rotation that drew the mission to As Sulaymaniyah. As Sulaymaniyah is a city located in the northwest sector of Iraq above the Green Line, a designation drawn on coalition maps indicating that the area is considered relatively secure. The area above the Green Line is controlled by the Kurds who have embraced the coalition's efforts to establish a democratic and representative form of government in Iraq. Members of the 3rd Squad were treated to supper in a downtown restaurant at one of the local hotels in Al Sulaymaniyah by the Academy's training staff.

Sgt. Jon Fouts of Plymouth has been very busy with his duties at the Training and Integration Program (TIP) Academy at the Diyala Provisional Police Headquarters, Ba'Qubah, Iraq. The recent change in the police administration resulted in a large influx of new training staff which Fouts has been tasked with bringing up to speed to ensure quality training is continued at the TIP Academy at the Ba'Qubah Police Headquarters.

As of Jan 14, 2005 we have graduated 1,222 students from the Training Integration Program since our arrival on station. We are currently running a class of 18 recruits through our course, which while smaller than previous courses, is necessary to evaluate and insure the training being conducted by the new Iraqi Police Instructors is up to standards and to better allow their developing classroom management skills.

We have graduated 59 students from the various in-service classes we have held and 311 students have graduated from the Jordan and Baghdad Police Academies since January 2004. In total, we have directly or indirectly been involved in the training of 1,384 Iraqi Police since the start of our operations.

Christmas Day was a little different for the soldiers stationed at the Diyala Provisional Police Headquarters than what they are used to back home. The senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and officers manned the first shift of guard duty that day as well as served the holiday meal, which consisted of roast beef, Cornish hen, turkey, ham, sweet potatoes, stuffing, carrots and loads of other scrumptious other foods. To wash it all down we partook of the festive the

sparkling grape juice, other fruit juices and virgin eggnog. The pies served with the meal were not in the same league as those prepared by our loved ones at home, but *Mrs. Smith* did the best job she could and it sufficed for a war zone.

During the past month several soldiers utilized their civilian skills, participating in two building projects. The first was the fortification of the new police station in Buhritz, Iraq. The building project consisted of building guard positions, clearing the palm groves around the police station for visibility and to allow clear fields of fire, upgrading the electricity and plumbing, as well as constructing and filling Hescos barriers around the perimeter. Hescos barriers are made of metal grid work, 8 feet tall, 3-4 feet deep, lined with felt and filled with dirt. They act as a barrier from small arms fire and explosive devices and are widely used in Iraq by coalition forces. The second building project was the construction of an Iraqi Police checkpoint in Ba'Qubah which is considered to be an important security strong point to protect the upcoming election process.

The most frequent topic of conversation has been about our pending redeployment. We have been receiving information about our scheduled trip home for the past month or so and in typical military fashion it changes just about hourly, but we know our departure is inevitable, we just have to be patient and ensure we do everything required on our end so that we do receive our call forward we will be ready to execute. We have completed several briefings, packed two duffle bags full of personal clothing and equipment and had the 1st MP Company present at our duty location on Jan 13 to conduct the required customs inspection of the items we are shipping home via the milvans located in Tikrit. That was a very exciting day for all members of this detachment because it provided tangible proof that we will be leaving Iraq in the not too distant future, and that is a prospect that we all look forward to with great anticipation.

January 2005 will continue to be a busy month for us in Ba'Qubah. We are actively involved in preparations for the Iraqi elections which will be held on January 30, 2005, as well as fulfilling many roles prior to, during and after the event.

3rd Platoon update by **Sgt. 1st Class Robert Haynes of Berlin**, 3rd Platoon Sergeant:

Well, third platoon, call sign Bladerunners, in Mosul, were released from direct support to the Stryker Battalion effective Jan. 1, 2005. We had a very busy and interesting month of December trying to stabilize the Iraqi Police Stations that had suffered heavy losses of during the attacks of November 2004. As we passed that mission off to the incoming forces, we have refocused our attention to that of clearing our living quarters in Mosul and are preparing for our journey to Tikrit to reunite with the company after our almost year-long separation. Third platoon members would like to take this opportunity to thank all everyone who have sent us cards and gifts over the recent holiday season and past year, they were greatly appreciated. We all look forward to returning home to our family, friends and loved ones in the not too distant future.

4th Platoon update by **1st Lt. Robert E. Teague of South Berwick, ME**, 4th Plt. Leader:

4th Platoon has taken on a broader role in security operations for Task Force Danger. We now support several types of security missions, demonstrating the great discipline and adaptability on the part of the soldiers of this platoon.

As the departure of the 1st Infantry Division from Iraq draws closer, two teams of eight soldiers have been dedicated to performing customs inspections of shipping containers (milvans/connexes) that will be going back to the United States and Germany. This is a tedious

but essential task necessary to protect our military bases and the United States mainland from any undesirable materials and contraband.

Vehicle escort and detainee transport missions are also critical at this time. 4th Platoon has accompanied several vehicle convoys in the ongoing battle to keep travel safe in this area of the country. Constant vigilance will provide the momentum necessary to overcome hostile forces on the road and highways of Iraq.

Training at the Tikrit Police Academy continues to move along briskly. The total amount of police trained in the Transition Integration Program is now nearing 2,000. New specialized training has been incorporated by members of the International Police Advisors (IPAs), who are civilian law enforcement experts, to address specific threats facing the local police departments. We continue to guard the Tikrit TIP Academy, although it is now largely self-sufficient, thanks to our efforts in training the Iraqi guards for the past year. Recent graduates from the Police Academy have participated in the successful assault on insurgent forces in the city of Samara, Iraq. This action has secured the stability of the entire region of Salah Ah Din and stands as an example for the Iraqi Police in the remainder of the country. It is proof that our continuing efforts are beginning to show results.

Our soldiers strive to remain alert and careful as we move into our 12th month in the country of Iraq. Our commitment to safety and mission success continue to be our top priorities.

1st Platoon update by 1st **Lt. Gregory J. Fillion of Littleton**, 1st Platoon Leader:

1st Platoon continued to conduct convoy security, detainee transfer operations, force protection and customs missions in support of the 1st Infantry Division. All of our soldiers are anxiously awaiting the end of the tour while remaining focused on what needs to be done here in Iraq.

Our medic, **Sgt. James Watson of Jefferson** was recently awarded the Combat Medic Badge for the lifesaving actions he took in Ba'Qubah this past June. Specifically, the actions that he took saved the lives of two soldiers who were wounded during an RPG attack while on patrol in the city of Ba'Qubah. This prestigious award is given only to medics assigned or attached to an infantry unit and must be engaged in active ground combat. The award was designed to provide recognition to the field medic who accompanies the infantry into battle and shares with them the experiences of combat. The entire company is very proud of Watson and his efforts during Operation Iraqi Freedom II.

Also noteworthy this past month was the promotion of **Spc. Jonathan Cote of Conway**.

The men of the 1st Platoon are doing an outstanding job and morale is good as we look forward to the end of our tour of duty.

Support troops update, **Staff Sgt. Doug Harvey of Berlin**:

Well this deployment is almost done. It is hard to believe, but January 2005 is half gone already. We have passed the 12-month anniversary of our driving out of the city of Berlin at zero dark-thirty, on that frigid morning last January. I can still see in my mind's eye the images of our families, friends and fellow citizens lining the streets with placards, wishing us well, braving the cold, cheering us on. Such patriotism and support took our collective breaths away that morning and have sustained us through the long arduous months of the past year. Pleasant Street that morning looked like New York's Times Square – it was awesome.

This past month has really gotten to be a busy time for the support troops of 2-197th FA (MP). We have been preparing for our departure from theater and scheduled demobilization as well as continuing to perform our vital roles which contribute to the successful completion of all unit tasks. We have been actively involved in preparing the unit's equipment and the required paperwork to properly transfer ownership to the oncoming forces. Our operations personnel continue to man the 24-hour Tactical Operations Centers and Division Provost Marshal's Office at Division Headquarters in Tikrit as well as the Diayla Provisional Police Headquarters in Ba'Qubah.

Our mechanics have been busy turning the wrenches to ensure the unit's vehicles were properly maintained as well as operational and ready for the next unit's use when we depart theater. Our logisticians have been busy providing the necessary supplies and resources for the company to function while simultaneously preparing for the Relief in Place/Transfer of Authority inventories and property book reconciliations. Our communications personnel are gainfully employed ensuring the unit's capability to communicate whether by radio or land line. I have been kept busy handling the daily personnel and administrative issues inherent with running a 180 man company, while completing the numerous personnel evaluation reports, handling the daily mail, preparing the multitude of recommendations for awards and providing the data for the seemingly never ending requests for information and documents required so that the unit can depart the theater with as few glitches as possible. All members of the support troops have performed there assigned missions with ingenuity, dedication and distinction. They very earnestly look forward to our departure from Iraq, demobilization and reunion with their families and friends.

On Jan. 4, **Staff Sgt. Walter Dellinger of Woodsville, Sgt. Norman Vallee of Laconia, Sgt. Andrew Larson of Pelham, Sgt. Jason Wovkenach of Webster, Spc. Charles King of North Stratford, Spc. Troy Taylor of Northfield, Spc. David O'Connell of Salem, Spc. John Stockton of Lincoln, Spc. Casey Pooler of Gorham, and Spc. Kenneth Peihler of Plymouth** were all awarded the Army Commendation Medal for their actions in September when the captured and destroyed an enemy mortar cell that was firing at one of the coalition forces. The platoon was also awarded Army Commendation Medals for its support of the 293rd MP Company and the Stryker Battalion for the last 10 months.

1st Battalion, 172nd Field Artillery Forward

***Capt. Erik Fessenden of Windham** is commander of 1st Battalion, 172nd Field Artillery Forward. His unit arrived in Iraq in early March 2004. The battalions has been conducting security operations. It returned to NH on Feb. 2, 2005.*

1/172nd FA Company continues to perform its Military Police mission of defending Iraq's Theater Internment Facility in southern Iraq. We have stepped up our local patrolling and implemented improved force protection measures in anticipation of the upcoming Iraqi elections. Our soldiers have done an outstanding job aggressively patrolling the local area, and their hard work has paid off on several occasions as we have located weapons caches and turned these

weapons and the owners over to the local Iraqi Police. We have worked with both the locals and the Iraqi Police to locate numerous landmines placed just outside our camp. We routinely set up checkpoints along the main roads outside our base to search Iraqis and their vehicles, and we are continuously working with the Iraqi Police to improve their policing skills – which can be both a frustrating and rewarding experience.

In addition to our base camp defense mission, we also continue to provide convoy escorts over the main supply routes throughout southern Iraq. These convoys can be particularly dangerous as we are usually transporting large numbers of detainees between coalition internment facilities – obviously a ripe target for enemy activity. The increased fighting in Iraq has resulted in a significant increase in the number of enemy detainees, which means 1/172nd soldiers have spent most of the past two months traveling between our camp's Internment Facility and the facility in Baghdad. Despite the higher number of risky detainee moves, our soldiers have safely escorted all detainees to their destination with no casualties.

One of our current tasks is to train our replacement unit to assume our mission, a job that we enthusiastically accept!! After one year here, 1/172nd soldiers are now recognized as the experts in operating in this area of Iraq. We know the main paved highways and the dirt paths, and when they become congested with traffic; we know many of the locals and which ones we can trust to give us good intelligence; we know where the local criminals and insurgents prefer to operate; we know the local school schedule and which kids should be in school (and which ones are skipping school!); and we know when to expect sandstorms and when to expect heavy fog off the Persian Gulf (after living in this area for a year I never again want to hear about how crazy New England weather is!) The challenge for our soldiers now is to impart all their vast knowledge to the incoming unit.

Over the past year, 1/172nd has done an outstanding job of protecting our Forward Operating Base and securing our convoys. While we are located in a safer area of Iraq, there have been enemy situations that our soldiers have quickly responded to and neutralized. I know that one of the key reasons this area has remained quiet is because 172nd soldiers have done the hard work to deter any enemy activity. Not an easy job at all, but you would all be proud to see how well these guys have performed.

Finally, I'd like to thank all our 1/172nd soldiers' families that have made as large a sacrifice as we have to answer our country's call. Your support has been overwhelming for the past year, and you have truly played a large role in our unit's success. We look forward to seeing you all soon.

The following note of appreciation was written by Lt. Col David Mercieri, Battalion Commander, who is currently deployed in Iraq as the RAOC Commander.

“First of all welcome home and thanks for a job well done. All of you should be proud of how you represented our Battalion and our State. From the beginning of your deployment, with all the unknowns of what your mission was going to be and where you would be assigned, you maintained your military bearing and professionalism. You trained to standard and when finally assigned your mission, you didn't hesitate; you accepted the mission at hand and excelled. You should be proud of the reputation that you created at Camp Bucca, the 1-172d Forward is known as a good unit that got the mission done. I also want to thank the leadership of the unit for getting everyone home safely. I hope all of you enjoy some well earned time off with your families and I look forward to serving with you in the future. Thanks for your service to our Country and making me proud to be your Battalion Commander. May God bless you, your families and the Field Artillery.”

Combat Service Support Team, 3rd Brigade

***Maj. Ralph Huber of Dover** is the commander of the Combat Service Support Team, which arrived in Afghanistan in August 2004 and is providing mentorship to the Afghan National Army in a variety of fields.*

Fifth Kandak (a kandak is a battalion in the Afghan Army) embedded trainers completed another major milestone towards development of a Combat Service Support (CSS) capability within the Third Brigade. The Transportation, Maintenance and Headquarters Companies completed transportation, maintenance and logistics refresher training respectively. Development of a CSS capability is critical for the long term functioning of the Afghan National Army.

Supporting this training were the Mobile Training Teams from the Kabul Military Training Center. They spent four weeks working with the kandak's soldiers and did an excellent job. The Afghan soldiers were very intelligent and quick learners too. Still in training is the kandak's signal company, mentored by **Sgt. 1st Class Eric Straub of Nashua**. They are learning the fundamentals of tactical communications and will graduate later this month.

The kandak also performed operational missions while in the training cycle as well. The kandak was assigned a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) mission, which lasted the entire month of December and into January. The training of the QRF was overseen but **1st Lt. Brett Vuyovich of Haverhill and Staff Sgt. Leo Enos of Lancaster**. The training and hard work paid off on Dec. 17 when the QRF was dispatched to quell a disturbance at the Pol-E-Charki Prison which had escalated beyond the ability of the prison staff and police to control.

The kandak responded with 100 soldiers in coordination with the 3rd Brigade Headquarters and reestablished order at the prison. It is significant to note that this was entirely an ANA operation with minimal support from the embedded (US) trainers. As such, the operation demonstrates that the Afghan Army is growing in its capability to operate independently and highlights the fact that the ETT system is working well and achieving the desired results.

From a team perspective, this has also been a significant month. **Capt. John Quinlan of Mont Vernon and Staff Sgt. Timothy Farrell of Hooksett** were awarded the Combat Infantry Badge (CIB). The CIB is awarded exclusively to infantry soldiers for "courage under fire." It is a significant award and we are all very proud of them. Since the start of operations four embedded trainers from the 5th Battalion team have been recognized for excellence in combat.

Also, of note, **Maj. Nicholas Adler of Portland ME, Quinlan and Chief Warrant 4 Officer Gilbert Colon of Rochester** participated in a Third Brigade mission to Jalabad. The main focus of this mission was to participate in a change of command ceremony. However, in the process they participated in a mission that captured over 1,700 pounds of opium and other drugs. Again, this is a major milestone which underscores the Central Government's commitment to reducing the production of illegal narcotics in Afghanistan.

Another milestone for the Afghan National Army is to continue the expansion of the force. 3rd Brigade has been tasked to stand up Kandak's 29 and 30. To that end, three ETTs from our team have been reassigned to the Kandak 29. **Maj. David Peterson of North Berwick, ME, Capt. Daniel Arseneau of Concord, and Staff Sgt. Jamie Scalese of Malden, MA** are part of the team that is heading up that effort. And, their hard work has not gone unnoticed. Their team chief has commented that they are doing an outstanding job. Also, working at Third Brigade, Headquarters is **Lt. Col. Christopher Conley of Wolfeboro**. He is responsible for medical support within the brigade but also handles the Commander's Emergency Relief Projects (CERP)

for the brigade. In this capacity, Conley has dug wells, improved roads, and provided assistance to the Kabul Children's Hospital. All of these projects directly improve the quality of life for the Afghan people and it is a huge job of critical importance to the success of our mission here.

Lastly, all of the members of the team passed through the holiday season in high spirits. This was largely possible because of the support of all of the folks at home in New Hampshire and southern Maine who sent us packages, cards, and letters of support. The volume of cards and letters was in the hundreds. Our list of hometown heroes includes Mrs. Kimball's students from the Village Elementary School (York, ME), the Fourth Grade class From the Little Harbour School (Portsmouth), Cub Scout Pack 201 (Newmarket) and Brownie Troop 2557 (Newmarket). I would also be remiss if I did not mention the efforts of the New Hampshire National Guard, especially Erica King and Kelly Loring, not to mention the support and love from all of our families and friends back home.

1st Battalion, 172nd Field Artillery, Rear Area Operations Center

Lt. Col. David Mercieri of Barrington is commander of 1-172nd FA, RAOC, which is supporting a command and control mission in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The team arrived in Iraq in December.

The 1-172 FA (RAOC) arrived in theater the first week of December. The team completed a series of collective training events to include a convoy live fire exercise, close quarter marksmanship training and several required briefings. Once our training was complete we moved to our base of operations, in southern Iraq. Arriving, we assumed the duties of Garrison Support for the installation. As the Garrison Commander, I quickly learned that the responsibilities were many and that I had the right team assembled to accomplish the tasks at hand.

As a Garrison Command, our duties include managing the installation base master plan, developing joint force protection and anti-terrorism programs, managing all base infrastructure (existing and new construction), Department of Public Works, terrain management, providing basic garrison support to include billeting, morale and welfare programs and providing law and order for the base.

The team has responded well to our new environment and opportunities. **Maj. Brian Thorne of Worcester, MA** has latched onto the huge task of managing terrain and the base master plan. **Capt. Charles Hackett of Portsmouth** and **Master Sgt. Ed Piscopo of Danbury** have been assigned to the Department of Public Works and are managing a number of base projects. **Capt. Steve LaValley of Derry**, our Information Management Officer, is once again performing his magic in establishing our computer network with the assistance of **Spc. David Day of Brookline**. **Maj. Mark Leahey of Rochester** has taken on the task of overseeing our two attached postal detachments and our base safety program. **Maj. Greg Blackwell of Dover** and **Sgt. 1st Class Patrick Plante of Easton** have been working the logistics process insuring the needs of the team are met. **Capt. Rodney Freeman of York, ME** our Morale, Welfare and Recreation Officer jumped right into the fray. Two days after our arrival he had the opportunity to coordinate his first USO show that included David Letterman and Paul Shaffer. The troops loved the show.

Having arrived at our base of operations, it was important to get off on the right foot. Having our stateside higher Headquarters the 197th FA BDE located at the same base has paid big

dividends. Col. Guise and his staff have provided a great deal of information to my team insuring that we get off to the right start. The information and insight has been invaluable.

Also, the team was very saddened by the news that **Sgt. Maj. Lee Donovan of Manchester** had lost his courageous battle with cancer. Donovan was looked upon as a great soldier and good friend. We will miss Lee, and send our deepest condolences to his wife Joan and his family.

As we continue with our mission our team remains focused. We are striving to make improvements in all our areas of responsibility. We have formed good partnerships throughout the base as we continue with our deployment.

END